

Dear Chairs Linehan and Anwar, Vice Chairs Welander and Bradley, Ranking Members Martin and Dauphinais, and Members of the Committee on Children,

My name is Sarah McKinnis, and I am a resident of Fairfield, Connecticut, as well as New Haven, Connecticut, where I attend college. I am testifying today as a member of the Yale College Democrats in support of SB 2.

In particular, as a graduate of CT public schools, and sister to 3 current public schools students, I believe that the mental health provisions of this bill are absolutely crucial and want to voice my support for these.

Mental health has long been an under addressed issue. CDC data shows that rates of anxiety and depression in adolescents have been increasing in the past several decades. Based on the experiences of my friends and relatives, while many mental health services do exist in the state now, students need better access to mental health care. Especially those students in schools that lack funding and may only have one mental health professional per school, or have a mental health professional who is not there every day.

This is an issue of equity as well. Lower funded districts also tend to be those with majority Black or Brown students. By establishing required mental health screening training and youth suicide prevention training for certain medical professionals, school employees and other members of the community, this bill enables other individuals who come in contact with adolescents and often have strong relationships with them to notice when a child or teen may need mental health care. It also provides these people with tools to intervene and guide a student if the student opens up to them.

This is even more important in the midst of the pandemic, when in person services are limited, and social isolation is greatly increased. Evidence from pediatric studies suggests that because of these changes, the teen suicide rate in the U.S. increased over the past year ([AAP](#)).

Furthermore, training and education for teachers and other employees will allow them to bolster the support students get from mental health professionals. Even in settings where people do have access to mental health care, it's important that they have other supports, too. I know that in my high school experience, I did my best work and felt good physically and mentally when I was supported by my teachers and coaches as a person, not just a student or athlete. The training, coupled with the inclusion of Social Emotional Learning in professional development standards, would make this support possible for more children and easier for teachers to provide.

Lastly, I wanted to add my support for the provision of the bill that allows students in Kindergarten through 12th grade to take up to 4 mental health days off. Especially in high school, I remember having a high workload and becoming very stressed about pressures to succeed and complete my work while also doing my best in sports and extracurriculars. Pressures placed on students add up, and it becomes overwhelming at times. I know I would have greatly benefited from being able to take a mental health day off. But, it's really difficult to do that. This would change that, and it would also help to legitimize kids' concern about their mental wellbeing, reduce stigma around mental health, and show that it's okay to take a break and necessary to take care of yourself.

After conversations with my siblings, other students in public schools, teachers, and administrators, I've realized that the effects of the pandemic will be felt for years to come, especially the effects on the wellbeing of children and adolescents. Passing this bill would be a crucial step in addressing and improving the social-emotional and educational outcomes of all students in the state.

As such, I urge the committee to support SB2. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,  
Sarah McKinnis  
Fairfield, CT